

BERNARD FRANCIS COLEMAN

Interviewed by: James T. L. Dandridge, II

Initial interview date: August 21, 2001

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Q: Mr. Coleman we're going to get started with you telling us all about who you are. Why don't we talk about who your parents were, where you were born and basically about your early life.

Early Life - 1913

COLEMAN: I was born in Washington, DC, in Freedman's Hospital at the time on a Sunday morning at 9 a.m. May 25, 1913. I lived in Washington all of my young life and we lived at 232 H Street, North West, which is no longer there. It is now a type of a freeway. I went to Banneker School, at 3rd and K, Jones School at 1st and L, and I went to Shaw Junior High School on M Street. I entered Shaw Junior High School at the age of ten.

What else do you want me to talk about? I'll tell you about my father. My father was a tailor. In those days they didn't talk much about their education. My mother went to old M Street high school. My father, I could get nothing about his education. Although he was an illiterate man, he read and wrote and read the newspaper every day. He spent his time in the tailor shop, making clothes or cleaning clothes, a trade he expected me to follow. I have one brother, who was born at the same place, only he was born on September 19, 1910. He is living in Washington now at the age of 91.

All my life I have been an avid reader, I used to read everything I could get my hands on, because that's what my father did, he read everything. We had volumes of Dumas in our library and we lived in three rooms; the downstairs fourth room was the tailor shop. We lived above the tailor shop.

My mother worked in the tailor shop as a seamstress and repaired clothes along with my father. And I have always been an avid reader, as I said. I read everything I could get my hands on. I was reading Beowulf when I was 12 years old. I read all of Hans Christian Anderson's fairy tales and anybody else who had fairy tales. I can't remember the name of the other authors. I read all of Aesop's and I read much of the history and I became a history addict at one time, which led me to believe that I wanted to be a history teacher. I never gave up on that, but I'll get back to that.

In junior high school, I did very well. Although most of my teachers couldn't figure why, as young as I was and the grade I was in, I entered the seventh grade at the age of ten and I entered high school at 13 and finished at 15.

My grandmother was born in Frederick Virginia, but I never could get her to talk about her age nor her family. Her family was nonexistent as far as we were concerned, although she had married somebody named Denton, who was the father of my mother. My mother was named Effie Lee Denton and that was that.

I pursued high school at Armstrong High School in Washington, DC. While in junior high, I took up a shop course, which was mandatory in those days. All kids went to the shop course and I went to the first sheet metal shop they ever had and that was at Shaw Junior High School, and it was quite interesting. Mr. Madden was one of my early shop teachers and I can't think of the long lanky fellow who used to teach shop there. They showed me some things that I never knew, because across the street from my house, on 3rd and H Street it was a tin shop, a sheet metal shop, a roofing shop and I always wondered how they made things. My grandmother made us travelers because every summer she would go to New Jersey and we would follow her to New Jersey and go to Atlantic City and spend part of the summer. My mother said the first time when I went was when I was nine months old and I've been there many times since and it whets my appetite for travel. I, though, have done a lot of traveling.

In high school, I became a member of the Cadet Corps. I was a member of the cheer leading squad. I was on the track team and the swimming team and that about summed up my experience.

Growing Up in Washington, DC

Interesting enough though, the area that we lived in, we didn't realize that at that time, but it was a ghetto. There were Irish, German, the Hiles were German, no, the Hiles were Irish, the Merchants were German, the Cantors were Jewish, the Generis were Greeks, the Colemans were black, the Wards were black and we were the only people on that block that were black. The Wards were the caretakers of the Riviera Apartment House and my father was the tailor.

Q: Now what year was that?

COLEMAN: I guess it was, when I became conscious of what it was, it had to be when I was four or five years old.

Q: We are talking about, before 1920 obviously.

COLEMAN: Oh, yes! And it stayed like that. We lived down there until 1926 and we moved to 1607 8th Street, NW in a neighborhood that was just turning over. The Catholic Girls Schools was just across the street and business high school, which was white, was across the street on the avenue. McKinley Tech was on the corner of 7th and Rhode Island Avenue.

Q: So you must have some memories of the Woodrow Wilson period

COLEMAN: Yes, I remember that I was brought up to hate him. I couldn't stand a man with pince nez needle glasses. My mother and father would read everything and they never liked Woodrow Wilson. Yes, I grew up with some ...the man from Princeton; the President of Princeton University became President of the United States.

Q: What's interesting about that period and I certainly would like to get your assessment on it, is that Woodrow Wilson of course, was big on international relations and the League of Nations, but he did not have congressional and domestic support. He never joined the League of Nations.

COLEMAN: He never joined the League of Nations. He was one of the founders of it but he never joined. At that time, everything was segregated. We had military instructors who were black, Colonel York and Captain Newman, people like that who were from the Reserves. When the war broke out, they immediately gave them (military) grades and put them out in the field. I lived at 3rd and H Street and the public library was at 7th and Massachusetts Avenue, a walk of four blocks. And I would go there twice a day and get three books, read them and then take them back and get three more. I read practically everything in the children's room.

Q: Now what do you attribute your interest in? ...You mentioned your interest in the classics and you became a history buff at an early age. You also mentioned that your father was a great reader. Did you get that from both of them or was it your own curiosity?

COLEMAN: Well, a lot of from my curiosity, because my father read the newspaper all the time. He read the Washington Herald, and we had the Star and the Post delivered to us to the door because we were on street level. We had a one room tailor shop with a bay window that set out with a big name on it "Walter Coleman, Tailor," and we lived above that in three rooms, the kitchen, no, it was four rooms - living room dining room and two bedrooms - that was my childhood.

Q: Gail Buckley, Lena Horn's daughter, has just written a book, The Patriotic Americans. It is a military chronology of black contributions, but she mentioned in that book, Woodrow Wilson has been variously accused of further segregating Washington, DC, after the reconstruction (period) in which it had enjoyed being relatively integrated.

COLEMAN: Woodrow Wilson's wife went to the corner of 7th and F Street. She was visiting; she was the wife of the President. So she was looking around and she found that the blacks were using the same toilet (as the whites) in that building and she immediately had the toilet segregated. That was her. And the building still stands, it's at Seventh and F, right across from the new arena.

At that time everything became segregated. My daddy used to tell me about going down to the white movie houses and seeing shows down at Loews, stage shows, and then they segregated it. But everything was segregated except the streetcars. The streetcars were never segregated. We rode wherever we could put our butts down and we didn't have to get up for white people. I listened to people that who didn't know and they always said that streetcars were the only things that were not segregated. There were some movie houses in Washington that catered to blacks and whites; they were the "Gem," "The Alamo," the Happy Land on 7th Street. And they had a board that ran right straight down in the middle of the theater, whites on one side and blacks on the other. My mother never allowed me to go into any of them, but they had good Western shows. Kids would come out and tell me about the Wild West shows. They had Tom Mix and Dustin Farmer, and Hoot Gibson and William S. Hart and Milton Sills, and every time I heard about the fires in the Northwest - Milton Sills made "The Storm" and it turned out to be nothing but a great big forest fire. Early in that year I remember seeing Lon Cheney and the Hunchback of Notre Dame, Quazimoto. My long-term memory is very good I want you to know.

Q: Yes, I can see that.

COLEMAN: And I could ride the streetcar with my dog whenever I felt like getting eight cents or a nickel and I was going to see my grandmother who was not living with us at that time. I rode all the streetcars.

Q: Why was the transportation system, why were the streetcars, in your opinion, not segregated?

COLEMAN: No idea. I know that they were never segregated. They would ride us out to Chevy Chase and we could look at the people at the white side of Chevy Chase Circle. They had a suburban entertainment center out there. Rides and everything, and we could ride up there and back. Most blacks, who had the price on Sunday, could take what we called summer cars, seats crossed-ways and open and you got air from all the sides. So we could ride there. Or we rode out to Suburban Gardens, which was a black place at 50th and Hayes Street and they had rides out there, too, and games, and that was the extent of that.

Well, we had movie houses, we had the Hiwatha, which was at 11th and U Street, the Howard at 7th and T Street, at 7th and Wilthburger Street, rather. The Dunbar at 7th and T Street, the Lincoln between 12th and 13th on U, the Republic between U and 13th and 14th and the other one, I can't think of its name right now, 14th and 15th. And U Street became the avenue on Sunday for the blacks.

If you wanted to see somebody, you went to U Street, and just stand there. We had our colorful figures there. There was old man Daniels, they called him Sporting Daniels. Sporting Daniels had (a) gray derby, gray shirt, gray tie, gray suit, gray spats, and brown shoes. If he had on blue, it matched. And he stood on the corner and he sang, not much, but he sang and twirled his cane. He was never without his cane. And one of the things that he did that brought the whole city into laughter, he got on the streetcar on the corner of 14th and U going down toward, we knew he worked down at the Bureau of Printing and Engraving. He was a coal passer they say. Everything was coal-fired then. And he got on the streetcar dressed as he was going to work, clean. And he walked down the aisle, paid his money and he sat down by a white woman who immediately forced her way past him and he moved out of the way and stood up. He let her out and when she got to where she could stand, he reached into his pocket and got a silk handkerchief out and wiped out his seat so everybody could see, and they said he wiped out the seat and threw it (the handkerchief) out the window. That's true. He was a character; well there were many characters in those days.

I have done a series of short stories. Damon Runyon was one of my great authors. He talked about the guys, guys and the dolls, Little Miss, whatever. I never missed him. He came out in the Colliers magazine I think. Incidentally, that thing lying on the floor is a copy of one of the magazines, is the first one called Jungle Jazz and it was done on the Saturday Evening Post I think. And that is the original, I think.

Duke Ellington and Other Classmates and Friends

Q: That's the original? How about Duke Ellington?

COLEMAN: Duke Ellington went to the same high school as I did. Then he went to Armstrong High School, and while he was there, he was studying drafting under a teacher named Ralph Vaughan and, in those days, you had to take a shop course and he took drafting or mechanical drawing or whatever you called it in those days. And Vaughan told Duke Ellington one day, "Son, you ain't going to be worth a damn." And that was done in Armstrong High School, on the 2nd floor of Armstrong High School back in the corner. So that was Vaughan's contribution... I danced to Duke Ellington when I first started dancing, in the Murrays Casino. He played at the Murrays Casino. "I ought to charge you for this," "I want to charge you for this," put my name on the book, you hear!

Q: There you go!

COLEMAN: He (played) at the Oddfellows Hall and the Pythian Temple. Those were the dance halls in those days and we had the Underground of the Lincoln Theatre of the Lincoln Colony. There were other smaller places (where) you could dance, one at the corner of 9th and R, there was a night club at 7th and T, 7th and S, and later on there was Herb Saunders' Old Rose where Jerome Carrington played the piano somebody, told you about these, too?

Q: Oh, no! This is the first time I am hearing about these two it his version.

COLEMAN: Jerome Carrington played at the Old Rose, which was on the second floor of a flat (apartment building). And it was run by Herb Saunders and every body, who was anybody who was there, Pearl Bailey entertained at the Caverns down at the Crystal Caverns and she entertained at the Howard Theater. She had a brother who tap-danced; I think her father was a preacher.

Q: The Howard Theater... and I'm going to move off and get back to you, but the Howard Theater was one of the Mecca's for black entertainment society in those days.

COLEMAN: Howard Theater, the Pearl Theater and the Lafayette Theater, the Apollo, theaters in Pittsburgh, New York, Washington, Richmond, and some in the South every now and then, it was part of the "chitling circuit." The people all stayed... Everybody who traveled, everybody stayed in a rooming house. Herb Saunders' lady had a rooming house at 7th and S. I can't think of her name, it will come to me sooner or later but all through that area, at 7th and T, were rooming houses and they were open to the transit trade. And so, there was one in Wilburger Place on T Street. The houses were big, of course, you had to realize there, life was hard because lots of people did not like show businesses, they didn't believe in show business, bad people! They didn't believe in showgirls, bad people! Atlantic City was another place where they showed up. Sammy Davis's mother (Elvira Sanchez) was a chorus girl under Christina Banks at the Howard Theater. (She also worked as a barmaid at the Harlem Club in Atlantic City.)

We saw all the good people, we saw all the dancers, Pete Peach...Pete and Peaches, Buck and Bubbles, the three guys that imitated the "Ethiopians in Haile Selassie," you name em, that guy who danced with Shirley Temple, I perfectly don't remember his name,

Q: Bo Jangles (Bill Robinson)?

COLEMAN: Bo Jangles was quite a pool player. He would stop at 7th and T and challenge everybody to shoot pool. One of the guys who played pool with him, a fellow named Wood, and he consistently beat Bo Jangles out his money. So they went down to Richmond and he beat him out of his money there and Bo Jangles pulled out a gun and made him leave town. Oh, yes, there are books full of stuff, I spent a lot of my adult life hanging out with these guys. There for the grace of God go I, if I had just batted my eye! I made all the games of chance, I met everybody who was doing something wrong, I met guys out there, you say, "I need a room, furnished in the next three days," they'd bring it.

Family and Early Influences

Q: This is such a rich beginning. I want to get into why you became who you were. But you're going to go into more detail on that later on. I want to find out what you thought, at that time, you wanted to do. But, I want to go back again to your father, you mentioned your grandmother around the Richmond area but not much is known about her. I want to know where was your father from.

COLEMAN: My father was from Danville, Virginia.

Q: Okay.

COLEMAN: He said he was from Danville, there are a lot of these Coleman families down in Winston Salem, and so we went down tracing some of these, I don't know whether he was born in Winston Salem, or Danville. He went to Danville to work in the mills. Danville was on Dan River and they had cotton mills down there. He was literate and he became a great Mason, he was a 32nd degree mason, he believed in that, he became...

Q: Prince Hall.

COLEMAN: Prince Hall, he was a member of an Elected Chapter, John F. Cook Lodge and patron of Elected Chapter. My mother was a matron of a Miriam Chapter and she was with one of the founders of the Daughters of Isis, Heroines of Jericho, you name it, and they were all in it and they were all given honors when they died. My brother and I never bothered to join. I said when I joined the Omegas (Omega Psi Phi Fraternity) in West Virginia State College, I wouldn't join church (even) if the Pope were swinging the paddle (fraternity initiation paddle). And I did not join church (until) later on but I wouldn't join any of these fraternal organizations. Religion and Early Influences

Q: That's interesting, I was going to ask you if religion had anrole in your social formations as you were coming up.

COLEMAN: We went to church twice a day on Sunday, sometimes three times. We went to Sunday School at 11 o'clock service and then went back to church to BYPU (Baptist Young People Union). I went to church at 3rd and H, between H and I, where Second Baptist Church still stands. The organ in that church as it stands now, I helped to build and put that organ in when it was first installed.

We went to Second Baptist Church and then my mother fell out with them and then we went to Mount Carmel (Church) which is between 3rd and I. There was some scandal in church and they decided the preacher and one of the choir members had an affair. She got pregnant and she went to Africa, Liberia, as a missionary and she came back, and she had this little boy. We left there and the family went to Asbury Methodist Church. My brother stayed in it for years. My mother was buried from there, my father never joined. My brother stayed in the church for many years. I left early and subsequently I joined the Episcopal Church where I married Jewel Coleman, who is now deceased.

Marriage to Jewel Cave

Q: Jewel Coleman, who was she, where was she from?

COLEMAN: Jewel Coleman was Jewell Cave and she was from Chicago, Illinois. I met her when I was a sailor in the Navy. I was stationed at Great Lakes, trained at Great Lakes and I met her and subsequently when I was going to Illinois to do technology, I ran into her and we became a family for 35 years. She died in 1989. She traveled with me all through Africa from the time I first went there in 1953 to run a school. I became the Principal of a school at Kakata, Liberia, Booker T. Washington Institute, and I came back and we went to Chicago and I went and studied some more at the University of Chicago. And what else do you want to know about Jewel Coleman?

Q: Well, I tell you what, we're going to come back to Jewel. We just skipped a whole segment of your life. I want to get you out of High School now and you mentioned something about... West Virginia?

CollegWest Virginia State College

COLEMAN: Yes, I finished high school at the age of 15. And I stayed out a year. My brother, who was interested in the violin, it was a professor in West Virginia State College named Clarence Cameron White, he was teaching violin and my brother went down there to study under him.

I had been running around Howard University trying to learn as much as I could. But, I didn't want to stay home, so a year later, I went down to West Virginia State College. I majored in history and zoology. I had two majors and two minors, economics and political science. Then, I was a student assistant down there in the biology department and the history department, and I graduated in 1935.

Q: So why did you select West Virginia, I know you didn't want to stay in Washington.

COLEMAN: My brother had been down there and told me about the pretty girls, that's why I went down there.

Q: That's a pretty career! Was there anything during your four years at West Virginia State that had an impact on your later professional development?

COLEMAN: I had a professor, in history... I had two good professors, Dan Lincoln and L.L. McKenzie. In my sophomore year, there was a course offered for seniors in Negro History. I had made up my mind that I wanted to be a Negro Historian and I took that course. The textbook was Negroes of Africa by Marie Delaface and I studied that book. Surprisingly, the course was open (only) to seniors but I slipped in and they let me stay. And I figured out I was keeping up with the class, they were seniors, until the test came up and the Professor McKenzie gave me my paper, it was 89.5 and I flashed it for everybody to see. The rest of the class had a 100... Bill Lonesome who was a lawyer in Charleston, West Virginia became very prominent and very rich. Ronnie Coltrane who was a tennis player and teacher down in the Norfolk area... I can't think of all the girls who were in the class but they were in there. And that had more to do with what I did in later life than anything I know.

Student Teacher at Howard University

So, after I left West Virginia State College, I fooled around Howard and then I got a job up in Howard on the NYA program, National Youth Administration Program (President Roosevelt's New Deal Program), and I became a student instructor.

Ralph Bunche and Other Howard University Professors

At that time Ralph Bunche's office was there and I was right next door to him and he continuously smoked cigarettes. He was in the political science department; he was the political science department. We had Alan Locke up there; we (also) had Leo Hansbury, who had just left. I really went to Howard University to study Negro History, but there wasn't much of Negro History there at that time.

Before I went to Howard, a year of that, I was out of school and fooling around. I ran into a guy who was as straight-laced as that lamp there, who walked out of his house at 5 o'clock every day and walked up the street from 9th and P next to Shiloh Church to 9th and Rhode Island Avenue to the Y.M.C.A. And he would have his lunch and dinner there by himself and then he would march back down the street. And I worked for him for a little while; his name was Carter G. Woodson.

Q: Mr. Negro History himself (Creator of National Negro History Week/Month)!

COLEMAN: And I got disgusted at Howard University because they weren't ready for Negro History, per se. I had a professor named Dyson who said, "The Man Who Wrote the Book gets 'A,' the man who teaches the book gets 'B,' the best you can get is a 'C.'" Is that any way? So I got disgusted and left.

At that time I had to pass 7th and T where everything was going on so I spent a lot of my time at 7th and T and I ran into a lot of real characters who could match anything in a Daymon Runyon story. A hold 'em Yale, or whatever, and I began to make history of what I read, I mean... but I put it in a factional situation. It is real but you wouldn't know by the names, you see, and most of them are dead now anyway. My problem now is that I have outlived all my peers and so if I didn't have young friends I wouldn't have any friends. My brother is at that stage right now, he has no friends whatsoever.

Q: Let me ask you something about that that was a very dynamic period at Howard University, for instance, Ralph Bunche and John Davis.

COLEMAN: No, John was not there then. He was not there. John W. Davis was in West Virginia State College. He was a classmate of the President of Howard. They were at Morehouse together.

Q: The reason I mentioned his name is in connection with Ralph Bunche who was one of the co-founders of the Negro, National Negro Conference, the Black political party at that time...

COLEMAN: Pan Africanism - Rayford Logan was part of that. I studied under Rayford Logan. I was ready to get on the freight and go to Atlanta Georgia to study under him. I studied under that redheaded freckled-faced genius ...I studied under Leo Hansbury; I knew Goode; he wasn't teaching then but I picked his brain. And, Harold Lewis, Wilston Lafton, Dyson and the red headed freckled-faced, what's his name.

Q: Well there was a big schism there and Ralph Bunche was identified as one of the "young Turks" and clashed with W.E.B. Dubois.

COLEMAN: Not there, not at Howard.

Public School Teacher - 1937

So when I left Howard in 1937 I went in to the public school system. I had been looking for a job and so I went to work in Shaw Junior High, at Terrell Junior High School, I think it was, as a sheet-metal teacher. I made a survey in 1936 when I was working in the recreation department, about narcotics and whisky around the three high schools. There was Cardoza, Armstrong, and Dunbar and hanging out with these guys, I knew what was going on. And I was just trying to make them aware and it hit the papers and the superintendent of schools said, "He don't know what he is talking about," so I got blacklisted.

Teaching Negro History and Working in Africa

So I never taught my, I never taught my Negro History, which, until I got in Morgan (Morgan College, Baltimore, Maryland). I taught it at A & T, I taught in Morgan and I had followed Negro History. The one thing that put me off was while I was in the graduate school. They told you what you were going to write, in those days, because Howard had Publisher Perrish. So Wesley told me, he asked me what I wanted to write and I told him that I wanted to write the background of the slave trade and he would sit there and say no you can't do that because there is not enough material on that. So I wrote on the Negro soldier. It wasn't very interesting in those days, but I've never given up on African history now. I don't care who you bring me or where they came from if you want to talk African History, I'll talk African History.

I found something in one of my books, I hope I can find a copy of it that proves what I had already thought about the African slave trade. I spent a lot of time in Africa. I went to Africa purposely to see what it was like. I went to Liberia first when I got a job.

Q: While you were doing your graduate studies?

COLEMAN: No, no, no. You want me to hold that till later?

Q: Well, no, no, go on and develop your point, this is important.

COLEMAN: I went to Africa because I had an opportunity to see Africa and I went there to teach Machine Shop. And I became principal (high school principal) and I began to wonder about what these things are, what happened, and I had heard about those forts around Africa on the ocean front, I couldn't get a connection, I thought it was a colonial powers protecting. And then I got hold of a map that said the Ivory Coast, the Grain Coast, the Gold Coast, and the Slave Coast. And I followed that down until I found what I wanted.

I have some copies of the article about a tribe called Aro people in Nigeria who became multi-millionaires, selling black folks to white folks. I've also discovered one other thing, you can't show me a black in the United States that can trace his family back to its source. Because originally the slaves were sent to the Caribbean, to work the sugar plantation and not until later, when cotton became king, were they brought into the United States. Hailey wrote "Roots." Biggest piece of fiction you ever heard in your life. Why would - am I getting out of line?

Q: Go on, go on.

COLEMAN: Why would a man go to a French country and in the middle of that French country is a little British enclave and he had a man who speaks no English or French tell him about his family? Alex Hailey didn't, he had never sent those people any money. And he added a figment of imagination. His brother, more recently, in the last few years, was Ambassador to Gambia. That's where the "Roots" took place.

Q: George Hailey, you are talking about?

COLEMAN: And I researched all the way down the coast of Africa where all these people were, and where black people brought black people to sell them to the white people. And if you can show me a manifest where the slave ship or anybody with a last name in it, I would say this, I got an expression... It just didn't exist, they don't exist and when you see all these people running (over) there, they are wined and dined by the elite, they never find out what's going on. I spent a lot of time in Africa. I went to Africa in '53 and if you see my diplomatic passport you know where I've been.

Q: Why did you decide to go back to the public school system? Whdidn't you aspire to teaching at Howard?

COLEMAN: I didn't have the degree; I was part of, what you've probably heard of as the talented tenth. And Washington, where I was living at that time, was very prejudiced at that time. Color and hair texture was the rage at that time. And I had already been "blacklisted" and I was glad to get a job anywhere. I stayed a temporary teacher for ten years, teaching sheet metal in the machine shop.

Q: Before we go to your entry into Foreign Service, did language play any role in your studies?

COLEMAN: I studied Spanish but I wasn't good at it. I had to take Spanish in college to graduate but I failed it twice before I could graduate.

Q: Let's go back to when you were a cadet at Shaw. That was a bithing in the Washington school system.

COLEMAN: I was a cadet at Shaw (Junior High School) and we had white uniforms. But the other (high school) cadets had blue uniforms. I rose from the rank of private to captain during the three years that I was there and I was treated horribly the three years that I was there. If I had told my mother, she would have torn the school up. My grades were so good on the test that they said that I cheated. So they called me back one day and put me in a room with a sergeant and they gave me a test and I did better than I did before. So to break my spirit, I was the captain of C Company so they put C behind D (Company) so that Pete Turner could be the playboy to lead the regiment. So, I wasn't happy with those people and that's why I quit. I went to the Navy and I came back for a couple of years.

US Navy Service, 1944-1945

Q: What year did you go into the Navy?

COLEMAN: I went into the Navy in 1944 and came out in 1945. I went back into the public schools until I got sick of them.

After my Navy experience I went back to the public school because the job was still open and they were looking for people and I had worked in the Navy yard one part of that. I forgot to mention that. I worked a year in the Navy yard behind the big machines and I learned that that is how they knew I could work in the machine shop. So that was an avenue.

I went back to the public school to teach machine shop at Armstrong high school and then they put me back into junior high school. When I was at Elliot Junior High School I was playing policeman. I got disgusted standing out there in the cold trying to stop the fights between the black kids and the white kids. So I walked out one day and resigned.

Back to Teaching in Africa

Three weeks later I was in Africa, in a job at the Booker Washington Institute as a machine shop teacher at \$4000 a year, with a house furnished. Then I became principal of the school. The president of the country appointed me as principal after the other principal left, so I was principal there for almost three and a half years. It was quite an experience, but it gave me an eye-opener of what Africa was. Since that time I have been to every place in Africa except Chad and Zaire, looking at customs and people.

Q: And during that period, I would imagine that you became interested in other careers in international affairs. Did Foreign Service ever play a role in your interest?

Africa Experience Spurs Interest in Foreign Service Career

COLEMAN: Well, I spent four years as principal of a school and, of course being in Liberia, I was associated with all the diplomats that came through. And being the principal of a school, that was a big deal and Tubman (Liberian President) would always invite me.

Q: That was President Tubman?

COLEMAN: Yes, President William Chadrack Tubman.

Prior to that, in the thirties, I was running an elevator (State Department) for my cousin. Whenever he was off I would run the elevator and make the two dollars a day for an eight-hour shift. I had the evening shift and it started at four and the people would start coming in at five from the offices. A man would always get (on) my elevator and he would light a cigarette and it smelled so good in those days. I always remember them and I was reading and he would ask me "What are you reading?" And one day he came in and asked me, "What are you reading today?" And I told him that was the only job available. And he asked me "Why don't you go to the State Department and get a job?" I was taken aback at the time. But I went down there and it was the State, War and Navy Department at that time. And they told me they didn't have any jobs except for janitors, so I had given up on it and went back to doing other things until I went to Africa and was getting to enjoy foreign service.

After State Turndown, USIA Opens Doors

My family was adapted to it. My family consisted of a daughter and one two year old son and my wife, Jewel. Well, I had taken my family to Africa with me and when I got finished with my tour my wife decided she wanted to go back home to Chicago. So we went back to Chicago and I couldn't stand the weather out there, so I came back to Washington and I got a job in Goodwill Industries, which put me downtown most of the day. They were over on 23rd and M and I walked home and I always passed these government buildings. And one day when I passed USIA building on the corner of 18th and Pennsylvania Avenue, I ran into this young man coming out from there. He was in a hurry and I said to him, "What do you do." I asked him, "How do you get a job in there?" He said, "Why don't you fill out an application?"

So I went in there the next day and filled out an application and left it with the receptionist. That was the office of the USIA and I thought no more about it, until a year later, they called me and told me to come down for an examination. (Actually) they called this to my father and he told me (later). And when I called up the young lady she told me that I was due there on that day for an examination. So I asked her why they hadn't informed me, that I was ready for an examination and there was a dead silence and she didn't answer but said, "Can you come tomorrow?" I asked her, "What time," and she said, "8:30." It was about 5:30 then, I said, "Okay, I'll be there."

And so the next day at about a quarter past 8:00 I was there and on the fourth or fifth floor at the USIA building at 18th and Pennsylvania Avenue. They ushered me into a room that had an alcove. They sent me to the alcove and, there, sat me in the alcove with a table in front of me. And in walked three gentlemen and one of them said, "This is your examination, Mr. Coleman, for the Foreign Service." I said, "Yes." I hadn't studied anything because I didn't know what to study. I only had a night's sleep on it. So the first question he asked me after he had introduced me to the rest of the panel, was, "Mr. Coleman, who was Jackson Pollack?" And I said, "Jackson Pollack was an artist who dripped his paint on canvas who made huge canvases and he was killed on a Boston post road in a Mercury sports car, which his girlfriend had given him." Well, there was a hush over there and nobody said a word until the next man said, "Who was Vashal Lindsey," and, of course I told him who Vashal Lindsey was. And he asked me, "Who was Carl Sandberg" and I said he was a poet. Then the last question was "Mr. Coleman, who is Frank Lloyd Wright?" And I said, "Frank Lloyd Wright, at this moment, is experimenting with a mile-high building." He said, "Can you give an example of his work," and I said, "Robey House in Chicago." Well, there was a dead silence and everybody was looking at one another because it looked like I had been reading their paper. I was acquainted with Robey House because I passed it when I was at the university. I passed Robey House every day going home. One day I stopped and read the plaque, it said who Robey was, because it was a strange looking house setting there in the corner.

Passes Foreign Service Exam and Sworn into Foreign Service (USIA)

Subsequently, after about a year I was called in and I was told that I had passed the examination and I was ready to be sworn in. So I went in and they swore me into the A- 100 class. I distinctly remember the A-100 class because it was all about Korea and what we had to do in Korea and I remember three Buddhist priests walking down a street on a video they were showing. Somebody said they could be soldiers and spies. But anyway, after I came out of the A-100 class I was walking down the hall and one of the newly sworn-in members, a young lady, said to me, "Barney, you know you are going to Latin America." And I said in a loud voice, "Hell, I don't want to go to Latin America," and a guy in front of me stopped and turned around and said, "Where do you want to go?" I said, "To Africa." He said, "Here's my card. Come in and see me tomorrow." So I walked into his office the next morning, bright and early and he said, "I have a job for you in Nigeria. It's the assistant cultural affairs officer. Do you want it?"

Q: Now, who was this?

COLEMAN: I can't think of his name, but I'll think of it because we became good friends. He lived up there they lived up in North Portal Estates. They had a nice house up there. Subsequently one of my friends bought the house and when I got back here from overseas, John, he began to beat me across the head to get my friend, Joe Palmer, to make him an ambassador and he had worked with Joe Palmer some place. Well, anyway.

Q: We're going to come to Joe Palmer later on.

First Foreign Service Assignment, Nigeria - 1961

COLEMAN: Oh, yes, we got a lot to talk on Joe Palmer. So that's how I got to Nigeria, I left for Nigeria in February, 1961 and we traveled by air, Pan American, stopping in the Canary Islands, Portugal and Guinea and then down the coast to Nigeria, a very uneventful trip because we traveled in the DC 8 at that time.

Q: Now do you remember who the Director of USIA was then?

COLEMAN: I think its Edward R. Morrow who is (was) still director there. See, that was my first assignment there in '61, I stayed till '62 and then from '62 to '64 in Nigeria, I mean in Tanzania. Let me get this straight '62 to '64 in Nigeria and from '64 to '66 in Tanzania and Zanzibar where I was expelled in 1966 behind Carlucci.

Q: Frank Carlucci, I want to get up to there, (but) before I get up there, let's go back to you're a-100 class. Were there any other blacks in you're a-100 class?

COLEMAN: Not to my knowledge. Leaford Williams was in there. I'm not sure, no, he wasn't in there. Leaford was all the way up in Korea, some place; I mean some place in the Pacific.

Q: Yes, he was in Seoul

COLEMAN: Seoul, but I wasn't quite sure, I don't remember, well don't remember any blacks being in that class.

Q: Anyway, he was in the consulate. Were there any other blacks that you remember in USIA that you came across?

COLEMAN: Rudy Agree. I remember about Rudy, because I approached him about the job. Off hand I don't remember them.

Q: There weren't that many.

COLEMAN: Oh no, no, no, it wasn't that many and most of them were all in Africa and I could tell where everybody was when I got there. There was a woman whose name I can't think her name now.

Q: You mentioned that you had an earlier interest in Foreign Service and you were interested at that time in getting into State. But, there was no interest from State, if I understood you, there was no interest in State to getting you on board.

COLEMAN: No, No. They said they had some jobs as chauffeurs and things like that.

Q: They didn't have anything for Foreign Service Officers?

COLEMAN: No, no. I may suggest that (the) reason Ralph Bunche left State Department to go to the UN was because the salary was better and a lot more opportunities.

Q: That was in the early forties when he went over to State.

COLEMAN: Yes. Was it forty when he went there?

Q: Right. He was on the US delegation, the delegation to San Francisco on the establishment of the UN later.

COLEMAN: I remember writing him a letter about a job, and he said I would have to be appointed by the mission or by somebody from the State Department. So I let that go, I didn't save that letter; I should have saved that letter. But I did write to him that I was interested in the Foreign Service. You want something on Ralph Bunche?

Q: Yes.

COLEMAN: Ralph Bunche was a cigar smoker from way back. You never saw him without a cigarette and he was a sharp dresser. And he was an associate of Rayford Logan, what's the little man's name, the philosopher...

Q: Dorsey, I am thinking.

COLEMAN: You called his name, before. But he was really the brain of that group which was up in Howard University at that time. So we were all except, Bunche was on the top floor, my office was on the top, Louis was on the top floor, we, three of us were there. And Dyson and the... was across the hall, and, not that Bunche, no what's the man's name, little philosopher who wore glasses... but, any way, I did not meet many black Foreign Service Officers while I was in State, no, I mean in the USIA.

Q: Did you have any, you mention you wrote Bunche this letter, when you were interested in going into State and he came back and said you needed a nomination. Did you have any other contact with Bunche?

COLEMAN: No, that's the only thing. I remember talking to him in the hall or his office and asking questions. And I wrote him. He was a very busy man, always on the move.

There is a man in New York that you ought to talk to on Bunche, George Sadler. I know that we were shocked when he died, but he was an inveterate cigarette smoker.

Q: Well, we've got you in USIA and you came in at the entry level, I'm assuming there was no... well, was there a mid-level entry program?

COLEMAN: Well, I was in the LR Limited Reserve 4 or 8 I don't know, I think it was 8, LR 8, I think that was.

Q: As an entry level.

COLEMAN: Entry level and it paid more than I ever made before. I was making \$8,750 a year so I couldn't turn it down and I wanted to be in Africa, so my first assignment was in Nigeria. And on that mission, there was one other black, Elsie, what's Elsie's name? She was in that mission with me and the young man I replaced was leaving, so there were only two Blacks in that mission and I came in as assistant cultural affairs officer.

The guy they sent in as a cultural affairs officer, he had never been in Africa, he was a GS-15, white. And the day he arrived in Africa, I met him with the station wagon to pick up his baggage and his family. He got on the front seat and said to me before we had gone 50 paces off the airport, "I understand you know a lot of people here." I said, "I know quite a few." He said, "Well, you got to introduce me to everybody you know." I said, "I'm not going to do that. There are 50 million people in Nigeria. You get your own," and he was my boss, so you know we never hit it off after that. I got his picture around here.

My wife, when my wife came (to Nigeria), we immediately took every newspaper that we could possibly find and began to read who was who and how the country was running and what was happening. And so we read the newspaper every morning before I went to work, local newspapers. And, as a result, I knew people on sight and if you believe me that I'm not lying that I could get to the president when (Ambassador) Joe Palmer couldn't get to the president, get to Zeke. Ambassador Joseph Palmer - Lagos

Q: Now who was Palmer?

COLEMAN: Joe Palmer was the ambassador who subsequently became director general of the Foreign Service and later became the assistant secretary for African affairs. So I spent four years as a cultural affairs officer and after I left Nigeria and I knew everybody. And I tried to stay but forces above me got me out of there because I was too popular.

Q: What were the issues, bilateral issues, the major issues between the U.S. and Nigeria when you were there, as a cultural attaché?

COLEMAN: As what?

Q: Well, were there any concerns in the area of trade, economics, were there any political problems?

COLEMAN: No. There did not seem to be any. With the mission you mean?

Q: Between the U.S. and Nigeria.

COLEMAN: No, Zeke being an Ibo and a Governor General and a graduate of the Lincoln University.

Q: For the purpose of the transcription Zeke, the President...

COLEMAN: Zeke was a Governor General of Nigeria, subsequently he became the first President of Nigeria and we became staunch friends.

Q: His full name was?

COLEMAN: Namdi Azikwee. He never came to the United States while he was in office because he was worried about his country and as soon as he stepped out of the country, they had a coup. Now, my wife and I would entertain every New Year's Day at our apartment. The white cap chiefs, the Irish discovered, were the titular heads of all the big families in Nigeria. So I found out who they were and I worked with them. If Joe Palmer had Cozy Cole and a group down there I'd invite them, I'd tell them get a group together and they'd bring a hundred people down there.

Q: Cozy Cole was the musician, popular musician in those days.

COLEMAN: Yes, yes, he was a very popular musician. And we had a balloon trick, you know, on their lawn and make balloons and stuff like that. Subsequently, there became a hitch between the ambassador and the PAO, whose name was Swim. And the chief of mission was always the ambassador, okay; I don't care who else is out there, military or anybody else. But the chief of mission is the ambassador, and they were constantly fighting the ambassador.

Q: The PAO?

COLEMAN: The PAO.

Now if I heard (about) something that I thought the Ambassador ought to attend, I would have told him, I didn't tell the PAO, because that was for the Mission not the USIA. The Nigerians would not go to their homes. And that's the God's honest truth. I have a big party when everybody shows up. Pete Swim couldn't get em there, the cultural affairs officer; he was dead, dead as a doornail.

And I did most of the entertaining for the Nigerians while I was there, they would come to my house. On New Year's Day, we'd invite them for chops on New Year's Day. And you see them coming down the highway, umbrellas just twirling in the air, twirling, and the drums beating and in marching (into) my compound where I lived in the apartment, and sit down and drink whisky and eat a chops. I got pictures all around here of that. And they would tell me things.

They'd invite me to the club in the middle of the day and I didn't drink any whisky in the middle of the day. And if I was going to the club, I would say "I won't be back," cause you know, I never let the staff say, "he's coming in drunk and did something." So I would go to the club and sometimes there would be a folder, in my name on it, sitting there. And I'd pick it up and go and Xerox everything in it and bring it back, with it (still being closed with) tape. They wanted me to know.

And, there was no place that I wasn't invited. I sat there one night and Asadame (he was the president of the senate) asked me to come to dinner that night. And, along with my wife, I went and we were the first persons there. We got there on time and then the room began to fill up. The chairs go round the room, nothing (is) in the middle of the room. And I looked up, all these politicians came in, and Speaker of the House and people I'd never seen before. And everybody that came in, they'd bring them over and introduce me to them. So, it kind of got hot in the collar, so I said to Asadame, "Prince, I think we ought to leave now." He said, "No, you're fine. You stay here." If CIA or the intelligence could have listened to what went on that night, somebody would have been made. We sat there and listened to them bring K. O. M'Bawie up, who had been expelled from the NCNC. He was thrown out. They brought him back that night and there were big speeches about it and everything. The only person I ever told was the ambassador. I didn't tell the rest of them people; they wouldn't know what to do with it. Joe Palmer Pulls Barney Coleman into Embassy Lagos

Joe Palmer decided that I couldn't work in USIA, so one day he called me and said, "Barney, I'm going to put you, got an office for you in my embassy." And he physically took me out there and put me in the embassy because he didn't set well with USIA.

Q: USIA was in a separate building,

COLEMAN: Separate building. But I knew, having spent some time and having studied Africa, I knew there was something that had to be done. The white folks weren't going to do it, and I did it. I made friends with the peanut vendor, and I made friends with the president. I made friends with the taxi cab driver, and I made friends with the, somebody as the economic advisor, because one thing about an African, you never know who you're talking to. The peanut lady may be the cousin to this president. The taxi driver may be the father of somebody down there and you never know who you're talking to. So, and you want to know how I got back in the State Department.

Q: Well, before we get you back with Joe Palmer, who pulled you out of USIA, put you in the embassy.

COLEMAN: Yes.

Q: What are you doing? Are you special assistant to him?

COLEMAN: No, no, no, I was just a cultural affairs officer.

Q: You're still doing...doing?

COLEMAN: That's right and he liked the way I worked because nobody else was doing anything. The press officers couldn't get anybody to come to their houses for dinner. They didn't know where to look for stuff. I had all the stuff being brought to me.

Q: What about his political counselor?

COLEMAN: Jerry Green was his counselor, he was pretty good, the women, they would come to his house for dinner. The embassy was different from USIA, let's say, put it that way. They didn't trust USIA and I got a picture over there; see that picture on the end, that's kid's Coca-Cola. I used to have twist groups on Friday night, they were doing the twist and I made everybody get a Coca-Cola. Those babies drinking Coca-Cola there. So where you want to go from there? Well, I finished my stint in Nigeria and they sent me to Tanzania.

Coleman Transfers to Tanzania - 1964

Q: You went directly to Tanzania without coming back to...

COLEMAN: Oh, I had home leave before I went to Tanzania. Then went to Tanzania and I enjoyed it, (it) was a tough place to work.

Q: What was your position there?

COLEMAN: I was a cultural affairs officer.

Q: You were the CAO.

Shares Assignment with Tom Pickering

COLEMAN: Yes, CAO. No, I was still the assistant cultural affairs officer. I became Branch BPAO (Branch Public Affairs Officer) at Zanzibar, cause there were only two people there. Tom Pickering and I were there together.

Q: What was Tom Pickering doing there?

COLEMAN: He was a consul just like I was, we were both US Consuls. We became great friends. He told me at the swearing in (under secretary for political affairs), Barney, I never made so much money in my life. He (now) works for Boeing.

Q: I am interested in you two consuls here. Tom Pickering and Barney Coleman. You know I have been noticing that when you were talking about your rich experiences and we want to get back to Tom Pickering, but before we get to Tom Pickering and your experiences. I have noticed a lot of artifacts here. Art artifacts from Africa, all museum quality. And I am assuming that this started while you were in Nigeria although you had an interest before, being posted there, so, why don't you tell a little about that, and whether there was any impact from earlier programs, like the WPA etc.?

Interest in African Art Collecting

COLEMAN: You want me to start now. My interest in African art had always been there, from reading. And I had always promised myself that someday I was going to have some good, at least one good African mask. In 1940, it was the summer of 1947, when I enrolled in the University of Chicago. Coming down 60th Street one day, I saw two figures in a window. They were eight dollars a piece, and I did not have the eight dollars, so I put down two dollars on them. And those were my first two pieces of African art. And if you turn your head around, they are sitting in a corner over there. See those two figures, those are the first two pieces of African art, since that time we have had over two hundred - twenty five hundred pieces of African art. What you see there, my son has a lot in his house, he started bringing them and that's why it's scattered. I had to move. I shall give you a copy of some of the writings of them; I have over there some articles I have written down on them.

When they opened the Museum of African Art here, I had just come out of a (pause), no, before they moved it, I had sent up a big box of stuff home to my mother's house. And I ran into Warren Robins (museum curator) and he asked if he could go over there and look at this stuff. He took stuff for the first museum of African Art. It was on display, my work and Soapy William's (former governor of Michigan and first assistant secretary for African affairs) work were in that first exhibit.

So, when I got to Liberia I really started, because I was back in the hinterland. I was back in Kakata, and all the traders would come to me first before they went to Monrovia. And so I got good bargains, because the traders, who were Mandingos, if they had gold they put it in my safe. They trusted me to keep their gold. And I forgot sometimes that I had it and they come to me and said, "Hey, where's the gold" and then I would give it to them. Or they would come and leave ivory in the house, just stack it in there, and say, "We'll see you," and then they would go. So I had a great rapport with all of the traders, Charlie Number 9, Charlie Number 4, you name em. I knew them all, and we got along well with them.

They made me a Mandingo chief. One day, a chief's grandson had swallowed a ring, and I was coming up the road going to the Firestone plantation. I had a Mercury car, and the chief ran out, and said, "Baby swallow! Baby swallow! Baby swallow" and kept doing that pointing to the baby, so I said, "Get in." There was a clinic down there run by a native lady. Her name is Moore. But on the way I was flying, and I hit a rock, whoom! And the back of the car jumped up and the thing bounced up. And he said I saved that baby's life. You know I could walk through that Mandingo village with all those naked women and not a soul would say a word. I could go any place. They invited me into the mosque, and I took my shoes off and I made my son who was so tall take off his shoes. And they were surprised. They were the first tribe invited to that school, for a commencement exercise or anything going on and they were living far from here across the river there from the school, if that far. But nobody would invite them because they were Muslims. So I invited them.

The night before we were going to have this commencement exercise, my boy began to roast a pig. Oh, they would roast pig like you would not believe it and barbeque keeps coming out of the ground, and we served barbecue and jars of rice and stuff like that. And then the Mandingo chief came over to me and said, "Mr. Coleman, when are we going to eat," and that's just what I did. I said, "Tomorrow, you send your people here and I'm going to give you one cow." We had cows out there. And tomorrow, at 8 o'clock they were out there. And I told them, "Go pick out a cow." And I had never seen anything like it before. One guy got in front of that cow and the other one got behind it and said something and he grabbed the cow's tail and he put a rope and he led the cow. It wasn't kicking or doing anything. They had cow that day and you could hear the noise; for miles and I could do no wrong in that village. So I had some good experiences.

Q: So I am assuming, not assuming, I am concluding that thaexperience in Liberia-

COLEMAN: That was Liberia.

Q: Let me go back to your first experience, your first Foreign Service experience which is Nigeria. You played a major role in furthering US policy through your personal charisma with opinion leaders, and other people of repute in the country and were a direct bridge to the Chief of Mission.

Promoting US Policy Through Personal Charisma

COLEMAN: If he (Joe Palmer) were living today he would tell you, and I will get to that too. People, who I didn't know, would come up and say Mr. Coleman, I am so and so, he is a big shot. I never met the Mayor of Lagos. But, he gave me a going away party. We had so much stuff, I got pictures there, and articles in the newspaper about us leaving. No American has had that kind of display. And I have got the articles here. My wife, they just worshiped her. She worked in the community, taught women painting, go to where there had been a famine or something, give out food, I mean she was working. My son played with the boys, and played with the ambassador's son mostly. But we made an impact if I have to say so, and we made an impact, because I got a picture here some place where the Yoruba tribe sent a petition to the ambassador to keep me there. And I got the picture.

So now I am getting around to Joe Palmer. When I went to Tanzania, Joe came home and became director general. And I didn't see much of him because I was overseas. Then he moved to, when I got expelled from Zanzibar, the Chinese had me run out of there. Rusk was president, no was secretary of state.

Q: Dean Rusk, right?

COLEMAN: Yes. And Palmer went there as assistant secretary of State for African affairs. Soon after he got in, just before he got in I got expelled. So I went up to Kenya and helped out Bev Carter for a while.

Q: I want you to come back and tell me why you were expelled?

Coleman Expelled from Zanzibar

COLEMAN: I'll tell you right now. I was expelled because I had made too many friends in Zanzibar when the Chinese were there. I had a tail of three people following me the whole time I was there. And wherever I would go I would see Sosalli, Salli or So, and I would speak to him. Karume (the president) liked me and I had gotten a trip for his wife on our exchange program to go to the United States. She had been to Russia, she had been to Moscow, I mean to China.

Karume was [the] president of Zanzibar. Nyerere was the president of Tanzania. I went to Nairobi, then to Kampala. They had a coup on the day after I got there, so they transferred me up to Sudan. And I was just getting tired of being floating, so... When I got expelled... I have to backtrack a little bit. When the President told me that he called Tom Pickering and me in one day and sitting there (pointing) is the president, and I could kick him. And sitting there (pointing) was Tom Pickering, and over there (pointing) is 25 wild men. That was the Revolutionary Council, with guns in their belts. Crazy people.

So the president would not speak to me in English. He spoke to Tom in Swahili and accused me of subverting the youth of the island. I had motion pictures of boxing brought in. I had boxing gloves sent to me. I had movies every Friday night in my place. They would not let me go out in the big field; I had to do it right in my property. And the Chinese would be waving banners on their movie. And I got shoot-em-ups, I got a 007 (James Bond movies), and I got everybody coming.

That day, the first day, they accused me of giving these cards out to the kids. So, the minister of education, who was an Arab, jumped up and said I had given out three hundred to five hundred of these cards. And I said, "Mr. President, your minister is in error. I haven't given out five hundred. I have given out a thousand of them. You want 'em [them]?" And he said, "Yes" in English, "Send them to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs." So we left. As I sat there and talked to him, and listened to him talk to Tom in Swahili, I looked at his feet. He had on odd socks. And I came out of there laughing. And I said, "Tom, we ought to get that man some socks."

Two weeks later he sent for us again. He's there, Tom's there, and am here and nobody there. Not a soul.

Q: No Revolutionary Council.

COLEMAN: No Revolutionary Council and he said in a quiet manner, "Mr. Coleman, you got to leave the Island." I said, "What did I do?" He said, "Nothing. I lost in the power struggle last night. I had to give up somebody, so I had to sacrifice you." I said, "Okay, Mr. President, if that's your wish." I said, "We can get by that." We left there and Tom was with me all the way. Tom went in and started sending cables. He sent Rusk a cable, Rusk sent a cable back, "Keep Coleman there as an example." Coleman to Rusk, "Get me out of here." Nyerere to Rusk, "Coleman has done nothing wrong. He can work in Dar es Salaam." Coleman to Rusk, "Get me out of here." I asked the President when did I have to leave. They usually give 24 hours to get the hell out of there.

Frank Carlucci Also Expelled

They gave Frank Carlucci 24 hours to get the hell out of there. He was expelled that's why I was there. Frank Carlucci and Gordon. Frank was there, I think he was the consul there. It had been a consulate general there until the Revolution, then he downgraded it. So Frank and Gordon got on the telephone one day. Soapy Williams had sent a cable, a letter, rather, to the embassy for delivery to Karume and they were having some kind of big celebration and they wanted to do it on this day. They were going to give him the letter celebrating and congratulations. And the letter got there late. So, Gordon picked up the phone and called Carlucci. "Frank, we missed the president" and this is actually what they were saying, "we missed the president today and we're sorry about that but we'll have more ammunition the next time."

It was reported and they got 24 hours to go in there to leave Dar es Salaam and, I put Carlucci on the plane. We all went in to the airport you know, and put him on the plane, so that's how Frank Carlucci got expelled from Zanzibar if he didn't know (why) he was expelled from Zanzibar.

Q: I didn't know that.

COLEMAN: And they sent in Tom because there was a little bastard of a consul there. No, Tom came in before that and Tom stayed and he ran a shop by himself. They then cut out USIA over there as I understand but I got some pictures of what I did. I built a place for USIA that had a presence right on the playing field, right out there, where you could see it and I had an excellent thing. I sent the pictures to Washington; they knew I was doing a good job, so that's how I got expelled. What else you want to know about Tom Pickering?

Q: Well, I'll tell you what. That's where we are going to pick up the next time. This is so gripping and I don't want to stop and change the tape in the middle of a pickup. Oh, no, I'm at the end of this tape now.

Dr. Coleman, when we talked we were talking about Tom Pickering coming in, this is after Frank Carlucci. Consul Frank Carlucci in those days had been PNGed [declared persona non grata]. I want you to sort of go back on your own.

Chinese Influence in Zanzibar

COLEMAN: There was another consul there, I can't recall his name. He became ambassador later on in life. And he was transferred some place else and Tom Pickering came in. Tom Pickering was fluent in Swahili and he was a tall well-liked fellow and he moves very easily among the powers that be in Zanzibar. Of course at that time the Chinese were running everything and the Revolutionary Council thought they were but, the Chinese were actually running things.

So Tom and I became quite close. And we shared secrets together and we didn't hide anything from one another. When time came to go, Tom had a sense that the president was going to expel somebody so he came to me and said, "Barney, the president wants to see us on Tuesday 11.00 o'clock over at the Palace." So on Tuesday at 11.00 o'clock we showed up and there's the president waiting for us. The scenario was, the president sat facing me looking into the Indian Ocean; on my left was Tom Pickering in a chair by himself; and on my right was 25 wild men. I call them "wild men;" they were the Revolutionary Council.

Everybody had a gun stuck in his belt, everybody wanted to know they were important and the president would not speak to me in English, he spoke to Tom Pickering in Swahili and Tom translated for me. And he said, "Mr. Coleman, you are accused of subverting the youth of this island." I said, "What did I do, Mr. President?" And he said to Tom in Swahili, "He gave out some cards." Well, I had a library there and it was quite active. It was right on the main playing field and so people passed it all the time and they would come to get books. In order to get a book you had to have a card, a signature card, so the librarian could give you a book and know where to find you when you didn't return the book.

So, I said, "May I see the card, Mr. President" and he received the card from me. The Minister of Education, he was an Arab and he said, "Mr. President, he has given out 500 of these cards" and I looked at the card turning it over and saw it was one of mine. I said, "Mr. President, your minister's in error. I didn't give out 500 of those cards." He said, "How many did you give out?" I said, "A thousand. You want them?" And he said in English, "Yes, take them and give them to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs." I said, "Anything else, Sir?" He said, "No, thank you for coming." And Tom and I got up and walked out. And before leaving, (something) significant about that meeting was the President sat in front of me and I was astonished to see that the man had on odd socks. And I took him (Tom) outside and I told Tom, "Did you notice the president's socks?" He said, "No." I said, "We need to get (to) the (US) Ambassador Leonard to get him some socks, a dozen pair of interwoven socks." So that blew over.

Two weeks later Tom Pickering said to me, "Barney, we got to go see the president again." "I know he's going to throw me out this time," I said to Tom. "He doesn't want to throw you out," he said, "he wouldn't dare throw you out." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because you're black, they wouldn't throw you out." I said, "You want a bet?" So we got there and the same scenario, the president sitting and looking into the ocean. I'm looking at the president on the wall and Tom on my left but on the right there was nobody and the president addressed us in a quiet tone. "Mr. Coleman, you got to leave the island." I said, "What did I do, Mr. President?" He said, "You've done absolutely nothing. I like you. I can trust you but some of them wild men with them Chinese behind them decided that you're ready to go. You meet too many people on this island, so you have to leave." I said, "Thank you, Mr. President. How much time do I have?" He said, "When you get through with your work." I said, "No 24 hours?" He said, "No, whenever you feel that you are through with your work, you leave." Well, I was through with my work. Consciously, I was through with my work at that moment. But a week and a half later I left the island and there was no 24 hours.

Incidentally, one of the things that I think contributed to my exile was that I'd gotten a trip for the president's wife to the United States of America. She had been to Moscow, she had been to China. Now, I wanted her to see the United States and Ambassador Leonard pushed it through and I got a trip for her to go to the United States. I put her on the plane in Kenya. I promised her I would put her on the plane to the States and I put her on the plane in Kenya. And, when she stepped out the plane in Chicago, she is looking at my wife; my wife had that whole trip planned for her. Everything she wanted to do or wherever she wanted to go had been planned for her, and she took care of it and so it was a success and that's how I know about Carlucci and Tom Pickering.

Tom Pickering and I turned out to be very friendly and whenever he was up for confirmation I'd go down and sit with him and I heard Jessie Helms say when he was getting ready to go to India or Moscow, "Tom Pickering, you knew everything. I ain't going to tell anybody how good you are. You need to get up and tell everybody yourself. Tell them where you've been and what you did." Tom, I think, has been one of our most prominent ambassadors. He's had more assignments outside of Terry Todman than anybody I know.

Q: I find it interesting that you had this rapport with the president. You might have mentioned it before but just in case you haven't, I'd like to know how you got to know the president so well.

Rapport with National Leaders

COLEMAN: Well, the president is more or less secluded because he was always afraid that somebody was going to assassinate him. But he would take time out when he saw me and he was riding by and he would stop and say, "How [are] you doing? What's going on?" You know, pass the time of day he would do that and of course everybody is watching and then he would ask me how's my work coming along with that building you got over there. I said, "Alright, Mr. President, no problem." "So you got some good workers?" I said, "Yes, we got good workers." And he would go on and every once or twice a week I would yell at him, you know, he'd yell at me so it was one of those things.

There was no animosity between him and his family. I could go into his house to see his wife about the trip when nobody else could get in there. And of course, there was a lot of animosity from the Chinese that I had access.

Q: How about in the mission? Did anybody else in the mission enjoy the kind of access that you had to the president?

COLEMAN: Not over there, see there were only two officers oZanzibar, only two of us in Zanzibar.

Q: There were only two of you?

COLEMAN: Only two of us in Zanzibar and we had a station chief but he didn't count. Leonard got along, Ambassador Leonard got along well in Tanzania with the people, with Julius Nyerere. I got along with Julius Nyerere but I never had really any business except to say hello Mr. President, how are you? That was not my role, to accept the president as my personal friend and he'd say, yes, you're my personal friend. But he did say when I got expelled from Zanzibar, he did write a cable. Secretary Rusk told him that I had done nothing wrong so I could come back to Dar es Salaam and work there. "Coleman has done absolutely nothing wrong, he can come back to Dar es Salaam and work and I requested their immediate removal."

Q: And you left there and you came back.

COLEMAN: I left there and went for a couple of weeks in Uganda. A week in Kenya, a week in Uganda and finally I was shipped off to Khartoum. When I got to Khartoum, I spent the first day looking for the statue of Chinese Garden. I knew it was some place; I was informed that they had torn the statue down and soon after I got there I made friends with a very high official in the Madi family.

Q: Who was the Madi family?

COLEMAN: The family in the early days, kept this role about the fuzzy wuzzies. The fuzzy wuzzies, they were all from that same family, that tribe Madi. He became minister. He was an educated Sudanese educated in Oxford, very polite and very anxious to learn more about the United States and so that was my baby. I talked to him every time we would go out and he'd make himself available and talk and talk and talk until the wee hours of the night. So I knew Madi, he became the head of state, so to speak. Just before I left, because when he became that powerful, I had no access to him because of the short time (left) for me.

Q: How long were you there?

COLEMAN: I must have been there six or seven months.

Q: And what was your role?

COLEMAN: I was Information Center Director and at that time they gave me that title. I was in charge of the library, movies and stuff like that.

Q: And your facility was physically separate from the embassy at that time?

COLEMAN: Yes, it was. We were over here facing a unique situation. I could look out my window and look at a Hebrew temple in Sudan, a Jewish temple, and I kept looking at it and I didn't believe my eyes. I asked my secretary one day, "Who is that over there?" And she said, "Oh! They've been over there for years. Nobody bothers them."

Special Assistant to Assistant Secretary of State

So I moved around freely in Khartoum and Omdurman. I made friends with a lot of people because I stop and talk to people. And it wasn't long enough to get my roots in good because I had anticipated a cable coming in from Washington and every time I got up in the morning and went to the embassy, I'd ask a question, "a cable for me" and they'd say no, Sir.

One day I was going to a meeting and the ambassador popped out and said, "Barney, I have to see you right now." I said, "Yes, Sir," and I walked in and he said, "Let's go in the conference room," he went and closed the door and he pulled up a chair and said, "Barney Coleman, Ambassador Palmer sent for you. He wants you to come home." I said, "He is the assistant secretary, now isn't he" and he said, "Yes. He is my boss, so I got to let you go. I don't want you to go. You're too valuable to me here." And those were his very words. "You're valuable to me here," he said, "but since he is the boss, I'll let you go."

And so in a couple of days, by the weekend, I was ready to travel, and I came home. Surprising when I got home, Joe Palmer said to me when I walked in his office, "Hi, what you doing home?" I said, "You told me to come home." He said, "I don't mean... go home and play with your wife, take two weeks off and play with your wife, get to know her again, because you've been out there in the field." I said, "Yes, Sir."

And so I took off two weeks and when I went back it was on a Tuesday and I walked in his office, he said, "Have a seat." Now, I expected him to assign me to a desk and he pulled up a chair and we were knee to knee and he said, "Barney, the job I'm about to give you is (out of the) 15 people outside that door, I mean waiting for this job. Barney, I worked with you in Lagos (and) I know how you work. You don't always write everything you know but you get it across sometimes and you make friends easily."

And I look at those people (15 candidates) and I said to Margaret, who was his wife, "Margaret, I'm thinking about a special assistant. She said, "When are you going to get Barney Coleman? Go and call him up and tell him to come up." So he said, "Barney, the job I'm going to give you is my special assistant." There had never been a black special assistant in the State Department. The only thing he asked me to do was don't ride herd on his directors. I said, "I have no intention. That's your business. You ride herd on them," but the rest of them, it was my playground.

I went out; I've got copies of stuff around here where I lectured. I did 300 presentations to both, to all mixed audiences. I traveled for him and I gave him a good name as his special assistant and left everybody scratching their heads, "How did he get that job?" Since that time I've been special assistant on four other occasions. I've been special assistant to USAID Bob Smith, special assistant to Eric Hicks, special assistant to George West and special assistant to Ed Perkins. I know the job.

Q: I walked through all of those and what I want to do before we go to them; this is most historic for we are talking about here the first African American Special Assistant in the U.S. Department of State. What was the year? What were the major concerns at the time and what were the kinds of things you were involved in over and above being a spokesperson on what United States Department of State was doing in the area of Foreign Policy. Let's start off with exactly, when did this happen and beyond this conversation you just related, what other roles did you assume, were implied or were directly agreed upon? So you retired as a special assistant.

COLEMAN: Well, the first thing I did, I made friends with Charlie Diggs, who was the Chairman of the African Sub-Committee. I made friends with John Conyers, I made friends with the people that I thought would do the Department some good and whenever there was something that I could have them engaged in, I would invite them to their (state) department. I visited schools, I visited the Hill (Capitol Hill), they tell me they're going to shoot me if they caught me on the Hill, but I went up on the Hill and talked to the people I had to talk to.

Q: The Hill being Capitol Hill. COLEMAN: I made my rounds down there. I was more or less of a lobbyist; you got them down there now they talk about them. I did what I had to do. And Joe Palmer never had any problems when he went down there, he never ran into a problem once when he went down there. I'd go with him sometimes and sit but he never ran into a problem and I am very pleased with that, he always thanked me. Just in his later years, an assistant secretary of state for African affairs, named Herman Cohen, said to me one day... I was his special assistant. I couldn't think of Herman Cohen. I knew Hicks was in that picture. Herman Cohen in later, after I had resigned, they called me back. Herman Cohen brought me in as a recruiter, and made me a special assistant as a recruiter for minorities. And that's what I did for eight years in the State Department, starting in 1984 to 1992.

Q: And Herman Cohen, what was his title?

Obstacles to Minority Foreign Service Recruitment

COLEMAN: Assistant secretary for African affairs. Everything I've done was in the African Bureau and when I was with AID, I was in the African Bureau for AID. Surprisingly, with all that recruiting and the money spent, the "old boy network" would always get to somebody and we never got the minorities in there. They were being refused for recommendation by Foreign Service Examination Boards. I sent many a person there that had it and a lot of them were turned down. They used such guises as telling them after they knew they passed, if you come in here, you are going to have to take a cut in salary and how much cut in salary? Anywhere they felt like putting it, \$20,000 now. You know no minority can afford to take a \$20,000 cut in salary and this is the God's honest truth, a young lady out in India right now, they told her that.

The "old boy network" has had his fingers in the recruitment of minorities and wouldn't let up. When you look at the Examination Boards, they are all white, the examinations are stacked. I took an oral examination in the USIA back in 1961. I don't know whether I told you about them calling my house. I came home one afternoon, and my father said-

Q: Yes, you did.

COLEMAN: They questioned that a man who is just called out of the street with nothing to read, he comes in and they say, who is Jackson Pollack, who is Carl Sandburg?

Q: You answered every one of them correctly and more.

COLEMAN: They asked me about the Constitution. I answered everything, I failed, in two and half-hours I sat in there, and I know I failed one. I did not know whether it was three-fourths majority or two-thirds majority on the Constitution but the rest of them I passed.

Improved Access to State for African Diplomatic Corps

Well, with Joe Palmer, he gave me a free run. I could do what I needed to do, go where I needed to go and I did with him what I did with him in Africa. If there was something worthwhile in the minority areas, I would say, I think you better go to this and he would go. And this is a first time a black audience had ever seen an assistant secretary in the flesh because you see, the job is only two terms old. The first one was Soapy Williams, the second was Joe Palmer, he was the second assistant secretary for African affairs. So it was open to me but when they found out I would say to a certain party, do you have an invitation to such and such an embassy? They would say no, and I would say that I will see to it that you get one.

And that broke open a lot of doors. For him (Joe Palmer) I could do a lot of things. Ambassadors would call me, "Can you get me an appointment with the secretary?" Now, these were African Ambassadors who had never been here before, and didn't know how things work. So I made friends with them and I got a lot of information off and on. In fact, one of them turned out to be my very best friend.

I still talk to the African Ambassadors but I had a whole slew of them and my wife put on a fashion show with Mrs. Lyndon Johnson some place over there, I got the paper. Lyndon Johnson and Mrs. Rusk, my wife would suggest.

Q: Now this is the Secretary of State Dean Rusk's wife and President Lyndon Johnson and Johnson's wife.

COLEMAN: President Lyndon Johnson's wife, Lady Bird, and she worked with them and they put on a fashion show, I have slides around here, I have pictures around here of what they did. It was something that drew packed audiences for African fashion shows. It was my wife's idea to put the African women in African fashions, show what the African cloth could do for American fashions. So I got stacks of slides over there.

Q: Now this is interesting that, first of all, Assistant Secretary Joe Palmer was the second assistant secretary for African affairs and this is the first time that the assistant secretary has established an entrée into the African diplomatic community because of your presence and because of your outreach into that community. How was that received by the African diplomatic community? Did you find that there was more of an approach from them now to you, were they still waiting to be called in by the State Department?

COLEMAN: Well, it gave them an entrée, they had a lot of things just as they do now, they had a lot of things to talk about and somebody better listen. You don't listen, you miss something. Sometimes I would take it, sometimes the deputy assistant secretary if it wasn't earth shaking. But they had an entrée whenever they needed to get in to see Joe Palmer. They could get in to see somebody rather than waiting six days and the thing is all over. The coup is over, so and so is going to be president you know. Things moved very rapidly in those days.

And Joe Palmer, at the end of his tour, became ambassador to Libya. And one of the first things he said to me is, "Barney, you want to go to Libya with me?" I said, "No, I don't like the way this race thing is doing in the United States. I think I better stay home" and sure enough we had just had the riots.

Q: And that was in 1960?

COLEMAN: 1968, he left after that see; I got with him in 1966. spent four years around 70 when he went.

Q: Now while you were doing the recruitment thing, so this was unusual for a regional bureau to focus on recruitment although it was recruitment of minorities, African American minorities and naturally that bureau would have an interest. What was the functional bureau of the under secretary for administration doing? Did they get involved, were they interested, or did they support you, did they say you are getting ahead of them or was their any reaction?

First Black Diplomat Travels to South Africa - 1967

COLEMAN: Nobody said anything. Joe Palmer happened to be a favorite of Lyndon Johnson and Dean Rusk and I'll tell you that story. One day Joe Palmer called me in the office and said, "Barney, we are going to South Africa." I said, "You're going to South Africa." He said, "No, you and I are going to South Africa, don't you want to go?" I said, "If you go, I'll go." And we packed our bags and we took a tour.

It was in 1967, when the Biafran war was on. We stopped in Nigeria, we went to Togo, Benin, Togo and Guinea and we stopped in Malawi, Zambia, Nigeria, Malawi, Zambia and then South Africa. When we were on Air Malawi going into South Africa, Palmer said to me, "Barney, do you have a gun?" I said, "Joe, I haven't carried a gun since I first went to Liberia back in 1953." I said I found no need for a gun. He said, "Good. Now I'll tell you why we are going into South Africa. We are going to get Mandela off of Robin Island." I said, "Oh!" He said, "Dean Rusk got a letter from the president, got word from the president." He wanted him off of Robin Island so you see how long before it became a reality.

But (the) surprising thing (is) when he did get out of jail, see he had been on Robin Island for five years. Johnson said that was, what was the term he used? "It's barbaric to keep a man away from the mainland that long." Vorster said to Joe Palmer, who was with the president then, when we got there, "Mandela will die on Robin Island." But through insistence, and I think that it was through insistence of Johnson, before he left, that they moved him to the mainland.

Hank Cohen went down on a Monday, and I think that he was in Capetown on Tuesday, he left on Wednesday and Mandela was out in the street on Thursday. And, I always teased him about that.

Special Relationship with Chairman of Senate Foreign Affairs Committe(Senator Jessie Helms)

I left the State Department in 1971. I went back in 86. Hank Cohen became assistant secretary for African affairs. Cohen came into my office three days after he had been nominated for assistant secretary for African affairs and he was getting ready for confirmation. And he said to me, I am sitting there by myself, he said, "Barney Coleman," I said "Yes," "What is on your mind?" He said, "Thank you." I said, "Thank you for what?" He said "You know what you did," and he turned around and walked out. I had been on the Hill, and I had been in Helm's office. And I was looking for a guy that had worked in Helm's office, he was chief of staff, and as I walked towards the elevator with another fellow who was trying to find his car, this guy passed. I said, "Jim," and he turned around and said, "Barney Coleman, where in the hell have you been?" He said, "I saw some papers upstairs on the senator's desk," He said, "Where are you going?" I said "We are going to the Capitol on the subway." "Can I ride with you?" I said, "Sure." And I got in the middle so I could be next to him. And the first thing he said, "Who do you like for assistant secretary of state for African affairs?" Well there were ten people wanting that job. So I said, "I like Hank Cohen, Ambassador Cohen." He said, "You like that guy." I said, "I swear by him," He said, "You really like him." I said, "Yes, I do." When he got off the subway train, he said, "Barney, we are going with Hank Cohen" and that was it. I never told Hank I'd been down there. I did my work. Jesse Helms thought it was a good idea evidently, because the word came back that Hank had the job. Jesse Helms, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee. So Hank got the job and I became his special assistant.

Q: Now when you got the job of special assistant, was there anything different?

COLEMAN: Yes I had a free run of everything, minority recruiting, speeches, whatever. I have full run with Hank Cohen. If I gave a party, Hank Cohen was there. Believe me he'll be sitting there looking out of the window. If I had a crab party, he was there, and you know they ain't supposed to eat crabs. His wife would come and eat crabs, and so we had a good relationship, we still have a good relationship. So that was my last stint, what else now.

Relations with Key Members of the Congressional Black Caucus

Q: Let me ask you what, since you had more freedom, not freedom, you had a fuller area of responsibility with Hank Cohen, did you maintain the kinds of relations with the Hill particularly with Conyers and Congressman Diggs?

COLEMAN: Diggs died and Conyers fell out with me when I went to South Africa. He said I shouldn't have gone. I couldn't tell him why I went. It was none of his business why I went. Because, I did not know where I was going. I was told by the secretary that I was going, so he must have had a reason. One was that I had the first visa to South Africa by a black diplomat. The very first one. We didn't want a whole lot of a hullabaloo about it. So we, Joe and I, got on the plane and went. Through all of this, he got the feeling that Lyndon Johnson before he left office, had his fingers very deep into that South African situation. Because Rusk couldn't have moved on him if the president had not told him to.

Return to American and South African Interactions

Q: It is a very interesting revelation that you made about this exchange between the president and the secretary of state. Particularly President Johnson and Secretary of State Rusk dispatching Assistant Secretary Palmer with you to go to South Africa to talk to President Vorster about releasing Mandela from Robin Island. There is no where in the public accounting where it shows the American active interest in getting Mandela off of Robin Island. Can you develop that just a little bit more?

COLEMAN: Well, we did not have much relationship at that time, so it stands to reason that Palmer couldn't go on his own without asking Rusk. And Rusk had to ask the president if it was alright. So Johnson had probably been working on this for some time. And he did not have somebody he could trust.

Q: Did Johnson enjoy, as far as you know, any kind of relationship with Vorster?

COLEMAN: We didn't have any relationship. Back channels, they may have been talking through back channels, but I didn't know that. But I know once I got there, Vorster would not see me. He would see Palmer, but not me. He is the president, and he could see who he wanted. He would say "I will not see the Nigra," he told Palmer. Palmer turned red but it was his job to see him, so I didn't feel anything. I had a big reception. They threw a big reception for me. All the blacks from the building stood looking into the room where I was sitting there. I was waiting for Joe Palmer to come back and I was having a ball. Everyone was eyeballing, for the first time a black had been in there drinking. So I was the first black to do that. First visa, the first black Secretary, I was mean a special assistant. So I think I broke some ice, started some steps to be followed.

Q: Now this delegation did the US Ambassador to South Africa comdown?

COLEMAN: We were met at the airport and just as I was getting ready to get off the plane, Secretary Palmer said to me, "Barney, wherever I go, I want you at my side. You will be there." So, when we got there, they had spread the red carpet out for the assistant secretary. He was the first, the highest diplomat that had ever been there, first American diplomat.

They had put out the red carpet for him at Jan Christian Smuts Airport, and we walked down, I have some pictures, we walked down the red carpet. And we went into a room, and it was loaded with photographers, and cameras. And they finally isolated me from Joe Palmer. And they took pictures from time until times got better, of me sitting there. I was smoking and I had on a hat and took it off. I got a lot of pictures around here, and if you need some for your report you can have some. I got some pictures of our arrival. That's that picture right there. And there are others around here that I have saved. Dried up paper, it has been so long. October 21st, 1968.

And I think I broke ice. Since then they have sent a lot of black people down there now. As consul generals, not just as peons, they were consul generals and high officials.

Q: That was pretty much a highlight in a career for any senioforeign service.

COLEMAN: That's right.

Q: Now you stayed with Assistant Secretary Cohen, continuing the same portfolio that you had enjoyed with Assistant Secretary Palmer. What after Cohen?

COLEMAN: When Cohen left, I left in '92, Cohen was leaving, too. He lost his job, too. Cohen, he was still around, but then he went into the private (sector). He had made some contacts where he could make great geebobs of money representing African nations, so that's what happened to him.

Additional Obstacles to Minority Recruiting

Q: Now what happened to you?

COLEMAN: I came out and starved to death (laughter). I came out, haven't worked since then.

Q: Now, there are a couple of other special assistants' positions we didn't talk about. We didn't talk about George West, we didn't talk about Bob Smith, but they are... We didn't talk about Ed Perkins.

COLEMAN: All of those. I was invited to be their special assistants, because they knew that I knew recruiting. Minority recruiting. I knew where the pitfalls were. You see, we here in Washington, know where the State Department is. But if you leave 100 miles away from Washington, and you say State Department, they say, what, the state of Connecticut or the state of Pennsylvania. Is that the Department of State? They don't know about the Foreign Service.

Minorities have never been informed. It has been a hearsay thing. Somebody tells you, you tell somebody else. And if they don't want you to know, you don't get it. I have found that the people (that) should be increasing the number of blacks and minorities in the Foreign Service, they never do the recruiting. They think the State Department is an elite situation and only God anoints you to go in there. And if you ain't God's child you don't get into the State Department. Nobody tells you the pitfalls of what you must do. They send out the material, the material is never explained. You read it, and say hell I can't pass this, and you throw it in a corner. So much, I did discover one thing, that when they send materials to black schools, they hide a lot of it and they never get it.

Q: Schools hide it?

COLEMAN: Yes, yes I can document people going into an examination; people don't know where the papers are. They are getting there and they lose the papers. And then they tell them they can't be hired. I mean they tell them everything. And of course if you don't know somebody, you listen and say hell I am not going to take a \$20,000 cut in salary. I can't afford it. And you don't bother any more, and they lose you.

And there are all kinds of simple things, waiting, lose your papers, don't put them in the computer, they try everything to keep minorities out. It stinks what they have been doing. And I don't mind telling you it stinks. And I traced it down; I got names of people who pursue that method of keeping blacks out of the Foreign Service. And not all of them are white; there are a lot of brothers (blacks), too. And that brother is on the inside, he's already got his job, but he doesn't think about recruiting another brother, because his is a little closed enclave we have here, an elite, elite society, "I am a Foreign Service Officer," It ain't but 240 of us." Out of all of them 12 or 14 million black peonies, 240 of us and that's prestigious.

Personal Recruiting Successes

I have recruited and placed in the Foreign Service, I can give you the numbers. I have (recruited) several ambassadors, I directed their area, all kinds of people, administrative officers, everything.

Q: Let's talk about some of those, I know that you had some, well for instance, Ambassador Arthur Lewis. I know you had a direct role in getting him interested in the Foreign Service.

COLEMAN: Arthur Lewis came to me, somebody sent him to me. He said, "You go talk to Barney Coleman..."

Q: Now what year was this?

COLEMAN: Oh, Lord I don't know. It must have been, he was living right across there in one of those apartments. Oh! I have no idea.

Q: He was in the Navy at the time; he had just retired from the Navy?

COLEMAN: He was a Petty Officer, and he came to me because somebody said, "You ought to talk to Barney Coleman" and we sat down and chatted at my house. I was living in, I think I was living in Capitol Square at the time. I don't have any time frame, but we sat down and I talked to him and told him about coming into the Foreign Service, what it was like, what the pitfalls were and he took off and he made himself available, and he got to be an ambassador.

Now, I met Joseph Segers, who later became an ambassador, and I met him on a trip to Jamaica and I was impressed with him and I talked him into the Foreign Service, because he didn't know what I was talking about. He is out in the field right this very minute as an ambassador.

And I can name oodles of people that I have brought in. When I think about it, I go back and check, but I tried to fill the necessary positions that I set after and I am still doing it. I did better when I wasn't being paid, than when I was getting paid. I was working with schools and it is a surprising thing, minorities in general, when you say (work) abroad, go abroad, they don't want to leave home, they say, "Do I have to travel?" I've got a good friend and his wife didn't want to travel and I couldn't get him in. He wouldn't go in. I ran into schools where they said, "I could not leave my mother." I said, "You could take your mother with you." "No, I don't think she wants to go. Where am I going?" I said, "I can't tell you. You are assigned to a country. And you stay there for two years and do your job and then they will move you to some place else. You can travel around the world. Housing is furnished. All you have to bring (are) your pots and pans and your linen. And everything else is there for you. You got a car, take that; they will ship that. You need your children; you want to take your mother, take her, too." But it's a hard sell in many areas.

Q: Did you find minority schools, universities, a help or a hindrance in promoting the idea of a career in Foreign Service?

COLEMAN: Let's face it. Until recently, presidents of black colleges were making so much of money. And when you look at the facts and you talk to the president about the students, they say, what kind of salary are they going to make. Then you tell them. They say all that money? I ought to take the job myself. Surely they are not aware of the opportunities available in the Foreign Service.

They've got too much on their minds to sit down and talk frankly about opportunities. The employment people, they don't care. You give them the material and if they feel like giving it out, maybe they will. You never get a call from them that says, well I have somebody here that wants to know you never get that unless you stay down.

Ambassador-In-Residence

You see I was ambassador-in-residence just before I retired in 1992, I was down in North Carolina for six months and I formed a consortium. I had six universities. North Carolina, Central St. Augustine, Johnson C. Smith in Winston Salem State University, Shaw University, not Shaw, excuse me, A&T and Bennett, were the six schools. Inadvertently, I had put three private schools and three state schools together. I had brought schools from East, Mid and West North Carolina. And I had put them together in a consortium. They did not know that they could be a consortium until I talked to them. And the State Department sent the first Ambassador-in-Residence down there, and he was white. They wanted to give him credit for forming that consortium. But somebody picked it up in the State Department, and I had to report over there, that Barney Coleman had put that consortium together. And so Ed Perkins sent me down there.

Q: That's when he would be director general?

COLEMAN: One day his deputy, Ken Hunter came to me, and said, "The boss wants you to go to North Carolina." And I said, "When?" He said, "Now." I said, "For what?" He said, "You are going there to stay." So I had to pack up in three days and get down there. So that's how I got down to North Carolina Central. But I have made many black schools, I have done a lot of integrated schools, because I pass out the material wherever I am because I've got a case of it. I give it, all blacks don't want it, so I give it out and let the other people try. So it's been very rewarding. I can't say that I have hated any part of it. I didn't even have a dislike for my first boss, who was as dumb as an owl's butt (laughter). And, I think that I told you about him when he got to my first post, I was already there and he said, "You will introduce me to everybody that you know." I said, "No, I won't, because there are 55 million people here, get your own." And surprisingly, Joe Palmer couldn't stand him.

Q: In the course of relating this you have mentioned other pioneers, Ambassador Ed Perkins, his assistant Ken Hunter who became one of the senior officials, still is, as I understand, in the State Department.

COLEMAN: No, Ken Hunter went with Yahoo or Oracle. He was number two to Ed Perkins. He handled all Civil Service jobs; 33 thousand Civil Service jobs came under Ken Hunter.

Post Foreign Service Career in Academia

Q: In between, of course you were pursuing a very active career in academia. I noticed that you were an advisor at the University of the District of Columbia, you were vice president and chairman of the board of trustees at South Eastern University. Let's talk about your academic experiences after you left Foreign Service in 1992.

COLEMAN: My wife worked at South Eastern University handling foreign students. And, when she passed, they invited me to join the board, and I joined the board. And subsequently, I listened more than I participated. I leaned my head back like I was asleep, but listened to those guys. And they laughed how the governing board had dismissed the board at one time. And they laughed it off. So I said, "These jokers are not for true." And prior to that, somebody in the business office stole over a million dollars out of the business office and they weren't too much concerned. The man got some time for it. So I worked on the board and finally we found out that we had a problem with the president. People were accusing him of taking money for degrees. So everybody was sitting around looking dumb and I got up and said, "We need to do something about the board." So, they finally rallied around behind me after I gave a speech there and we dismissed the board. And then the richest man on the board nominated me for chairman of the board. I really had no idea of being chairman. At that time, we didn't have a president and then we selected an interim president who had packed his office with a bunch of lazy people. So we advertised for a president. We advertised for a president, we had a search and subsequently, we selected Charlene Drew Jarvis as president of South Eastern University. And a year later, I resigned from the board.

Q: Tell me about your experiences at North Carolina A&T.

Civil Rights Activist

COLEMAN: Well, I had come to Washington and I was living in Chicago and I was sick of Chicago. I left my family out there, I told them that I couldn't take it anymore, it was too cold. I came here and I popped in on J.C. Evans, you've probably heard of him. J.C. was my dean at West Virginia State College. When I popped in, he said "Coleman, I got a job for you. I want you to go down to North Carolina to A&T." And he sent me down there to teach history.

So I went down there to teach history. I taught the history of North Carolina. I taught some Negro history and some other courses. But while I was there, there was some unrest. People were talking back and forth and I noticed that the teachers still had their charge accounts in places where they couldn't try on shoes and stuff like that. So one day I was in class and the question was (put) to me, because they knew a test was coming, "Professor, have you been to the movie down on Market Street?" I said, "I don't go to movies on Market Street" and I pulled out a dollar out of my pocket, and I said, "If my dollar can't get me a seat on the ground floor, it sure can't buy me a seat in the balcony." So one of the fellows said, "I see that you go out to the airport everyday and you sit by the window and you eat your meal." I said, "Yes, you always see me sitting by the window; I want those white folks to see me as they pass. I say what you all don't know, that's an interstate commerce thing and the law is that anybody can use that facility; white, black, green, or grizzly, can use that facility. And they did not know that." So I didn't even discuss the examination, I began to talk about spending your money. The next morning my class was practically empty and the fellow who drove for me down there, Bill McGee, came in and said, "Professor, you've got problems on your hand." I said, "What are the problems?" He said, "The kids are down there sitting at the variety store, sitting at the counter." So the letters began to come in. I was reading these letters. Mothers were saying, "You don't do anything down there to hurt yourself." I read those letters and they didn't understand what the children were doing. But they did, and the president let me go because I had started that riot. Jesse Jackson did not start that riot - I mean, that sit-in. Jesse Jackson had nothing to do with it. He was in Eastern Illinois when that thing took place.

Q: That was the first sit-in?

COLEMAN: The very first. And there are few people that know, one is dead and one is living out in Wichita, and they can tell you that I'm the guy who started that sit-in.

Q: Thank you very much. Is there anything else that we might have missed that we can cover in thirty seconds?

COLEMAN: No, unless you can figure out something that I didn't give you.

End of interview